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AUTHOR	Haberman, Martin; Dill, Vicky
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ABSTRACT

Principals of successful urban schools have certain attributes that heighten their effectiveness. They exhibit behaviors and attributes undergirded by an ideology, that is, a value-laden system of beliefs that is "caught" by life experiences and not "taught" in graduate courses. Potential star principals must be screened and selected before they can benefit from training. For those who do not espouse an ideology, behavioral training will not be as meaningful. Since formal university training is unlikely to transmit a belief system, principals' formal training can only be valuable if the candidates have been carefully screened and selected as persons who are already predisposed to believe the ideology of star principals. Research supports this proposition. Training must not be limited to formal college course work but must emphasize on-the-job internships in which the administrator-in-residence is coached weekly by a star principal. Prospective administrators must see teacher motivation and nurturing as a top priority. Star principals must model appropriate interactions and communications with parents and model ways to help teachers meet the needs of students at risk. Principal mentors must also model how to successfully evaluate teachers. Overall, star principals must empower teachers and students to succeed in school regardless of constraints. (RJM)

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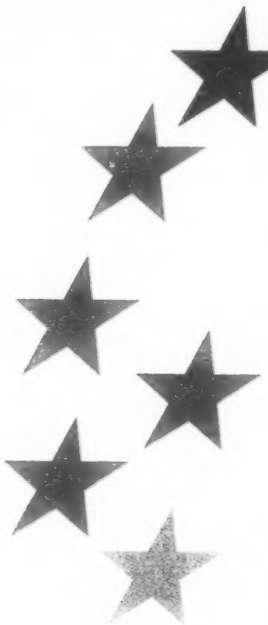
Selecting Star Principals for Schools Serving Children in Poverty



By Dr. Martin Haberman & Dr. Vicky Dill

Effective urban school districts are rare. All large school systems are failing to some substantial degree. Yet within every one of these school districts there are highly effective schools. The principals of these schools succeed in spite of the bureaucratic conditions set in motion seemingly against them by the school districts in which they must operate.

The attributes of star principals which make them effective against all odds and in spite of irrational pressures are more than behaviors. They are behaviors undergirded by an ideology. The ideology and the behaviors are interwoven; they are of a piece. The connection between what star principals do and how they think about what they do cannot be broken. This means those who believe they can learn the "magic" behaviors without having the belief system that goes with it are destined to fail. Conversely, those who would assume because they agree with the ideology they can automatically perform as star principals are equally deluded. Star principals are doers *and* thinkers.

Our basic assumption is that training individuals to learn this ideology is essentially a waste of time. Potential star principals must first be selected. That is, individuals who already hold the ideology which characterizes star principals can benefit from subsequent training and learn the effective behaviors. For those who do not espouse the ideology, the behavioral training will result in a hollow, ritualistic performance without commitment and understanding.

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Ability brings with it the need to use that ability.
— ALBERT SZENT-GYORGYI

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Star principals are doers and thinkers.

This does not mean individuals cannot be trained to become stars. It does mean training will only "take" with individuals who already accept and believe the ideology. The ideology is a value-laden system of beliefs that is "caught" by life experiences not "taught" in graduate courses of school administration.

The instrument we recommend for selecting star urban principals is used in urban school districts nationally and is entitled *The Haberman Urban Principal Selection Interview*. This interview focuses neither on personality in isolation or situational context, nor discrete behaviors. Candidates are asked to explain how they would respond to critical events. These explanations reflect both their predispositions to act and the specific actions they would take. The interview focuses on 11 of these: leadership; commitment to student learning; theory into practice; the role of the school serving children in poverty; curriculum and instructional leader; fighting burnout, evaluation, decision-making; fallibility; administrative style; and administrative relations with parents and community.

The Ideology of Star Principals

The following beliefs exemplify this ideology.

- For any real learning to occur, the safety and security of everyone in and around the school building is an absolute prerequisite.
- The teachers are not here to help me be a principal. I am here to help them improve students' learning.
- In order to improve the learning of children in poverty, the students and their families must be connected to all kinds of health and human services.
- The reason I am paid more than teachers is not that I am smarter, work harder, am the best educator, or hold a state license as an administrator. I am paid more because I am accountable and responsible for the effectiveness of the total school.
- Teachers who can control their classes are not necessarily good teachers. Classroom management is only the starting point. Student learning is the criterion for deciding teachers' "goodness."
- Parents are not the consumers of education; society is. The parents' role is not simply to have things explained to them and be consumers. Parents are sources of useful information about their children, as well as resources in the educational process and partners in meeting the needs of the children.
- Everyone who sets foot in this building has to be treated as if s/he were a rich, important dignitary.
- Leadership is helping the community demand what is in the best interests of their children, not acceding to whatever they want.
- Admitting shortcomings of the school program is the first necessary step for making improvements: never stonewall or cover up.
- There is no greater benefit to the school than getting rid of a bad teacher. No matter how lengthy or time consuming the process, it must be pursued to completion.
- For me to be accountable for instruction, I must be involved in the selection and assignment of new teachers to the building.
- There's nothing of any importance that I can decide completely on my own.
- It is my job to protect this school from the chaos in which we must operate. In spite of school board politics, temporary superintendents and central office turf wars, I can keep this school focused on the kids and their educational needs.

The obvious question is where and how does the ideology develop? Formal university training may teach examples of leadership behaviors, but is unlikely to transmit the belief system that must undergird it. The source of the beliefs is inevitably life experiences and results from individuals re-

flecting upon and extracting learnings from their life experiences. For this reason, formal training of school principals only can be of value if the candidates have been carefully screened and selected as individuals who are already predisposed to believe the ideology of star principals. Having selected candidates with the appropriate beliefs, we can train them to perform in the way star principals do. Without such selection, the formal training of school administrators is essentially a useless set of university courses that does not predict the behavior of those who pass them and are certified.

Evidence of this proposition is found in research. Three individuals (Emil J. Haller, Brian O. Brent and James H. McNamara) who are engaged in training administrators set out to answer the question, "Does graduate training in educational administration improve America's schools?"

First, they discovered the United States is one of the few countries that requires graduate training for school administrators. An examination of other industrialized countries without such requirements, however, does not reveal our schools are administered any better.

Second, they found while private schools do better than public schools, there is no formal requirement in private schools for administrator training.

Third, they examined qualitative data in which a professor of school administration ran a school for a year. Asked if he had used the theories and concepts he taught at the university, he was forced to answer "no."

Fourth, they surveyed practicing principals and asked them the value of their formal preparation on their actual practice. Here they found the more experience principals had, the more dissatisfied they were with their training. All principals saw many irrelevancies in their training.

Fifth, the experts examined specific attempts to connect principals' training and practice. There was not a correlation between how principals were rated in their training and how they were rated in practice. One landmark study even found a negative correlation between coursework completed and subsequent practice; that is, those with master's degrees did not do as well as those with bachelor degrees. The authors concluded the literature search by stating, "Overall...there is little evidence that graduate training increases the effectiveness of school managers."

The three experts then examined a sample of 6,341 schools. Their independent variables were the degrees obtained by the administrators and their major field of study. The dependent variable was school effectiveness based on five indices (leader, climate, order, policy and help) as assessed by school staffs. Using multivariate analysis to assess principals' training on school effectiveness, the researchers conclude their study in the following way:

> Taken collectively, graduate programs in educational administration seem to have little or no influence on the attributes that characterize effective schools....To the extent that these attributes are, in fact, causes of valued school outcomes, evidence that graduate training in school administration has no effect on them is evidence that the training is irrelevant to the goals we seek....This research casts further doubt on the presumption that

"The source of the beliefs is inevitably life experiences and results from individuals reflecting upon and extracting learnings from their life experiences."

graduate training for school administrators has improved U.S. schools....It is not evident that we should require more training or even different training. Perhaps we should require less. Or none at all.

Our experience regarding the value of formal training is more optimistic, provided the right individuals (i.e., those with the appropriate ideology) are selected as the candidates. The second proviso is the training must not be limited to formal college coursework but must emphasize an on-the-job internship in which the administrator in residence can be coached weekly by a star principal.

Ideology in Motion

Weekly coaching in what? What would be the top priorities of an urban star principal coach for an intern-in-training? Assuming program leaders and directors have carefully selected interns using the urban administrator interview, an intern will already possess certain characteristics upon which the principal/coach can build. The "building on the intern-student's strengths" provides both a good model for how effective teachers coach and teach students constructively, while creating the most meaning and purpose in an often-chaotic school context. What future administrators believe about what they are doing every day at school and consequently what they actually do is not the result of coincidence or heredity; there is no "principal" gene. Rather, personal beliefs comprise the sum total of meaningful understandings about one's experience accumulated over a lifetime. The intern-principal's sense of "who I am" and "what I'm doing here in this school" – identity and calling – will be affirmed and sculpted by the mentor principal in such a way that vision, mission, goals and objectives, for better or worse, can be more readily achieved and meaning can be built into the new principal's life based on her or his beliefs.

Is the calling of the principal to create a democratic microcosm in the school that will teach about and support a democratic nation? Is the direction of the principal-in-training to achieve high test scores or become "blue ribbon?" Does the principal see it as his or her role to augment effective teachers' practices and eliminate poor ones? Will s/he confuse order and quietness with learning? Does s/he want to be the rising star among schools in statewide testing? Will s/he know how to produce enthusiasm in teachers? Will s/he prefer to have merely obedient teachers who follow bureaucratic rules but possibly teach little? Does the principal have a vision that can connect the school curriculum to children in poverty from diverse cultural backgrounds?

Motivation

Prospective administrators can be selected who see teacher motivation and nurturing as a top priority and will work at it. They understand their mission to be that of supporting star urban teachers. The interview identifies individuals who will be student advocates, protect their learning envi-

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ronment, and understand the special needs of teachers serving students in poverty and at-risk. Lifelong learning of the administrative craft is determined by the candidate's commitment and effort.

This ability to constantly acquire new knowledge and implement it (applying theory to practice) and the ability to reflect on practice and access theory or research that makes a difference (reflection and reform) means coach/principals can bank on interns having "genuine" or "deep" understanding of problems in complex contexts and how to address them. The coaching principal will motivate the intern to greater and greater success by increasing meaning for him or her daily. Why is this so critical? Both experience and recent brain research indicate real-life contexts create more meaning than simple theoretic knowledge learned in isolated administration classes but which may or may not be available for real problem solving (Caine & Caine, 1977).

Achieving school/community goals requires the principal be able to daily motivate teachers to develop increasing skill in their craft and greater caring for their students. Can a novice principal be taught how to motivate teachers in these ways? Assuming the novice principal finds purpose and meaning in providing students in great need with teachers of excellence, the mentoring principal can demonstrate ways to motivate and bring out the best in teachers on his or her staff. The mentor will support the intern principal as s/he develops the vision and inner strength to argue successfully for what s/he sees as effective practice, rejecting what is easy or what is proffered by bureaucracies as generic solutions (Bass, 1985).

Successful principals for children in poverty will coach novice principals about ways teachers can avoid power struggles with students. Star urban principals know the many hazards, some of them life-threatening, teachers of poverty face daily: physical dangers from a veritable arsenal of weapons, threats, abuse, unmotivated students, and mindless bureaucracies apparently organized to ensure student failure. In overcoming these hurdles, successful urban principals will help free teachers from practices that clearly do not work but which teachers tend to repeat out of custom or lack of alternatives, and they will give them the power and resources to do more than grit their teeth and count the days until school is out.

Modeling

Principals will model and coach teachers in innovative ways to reach parents and use them as the teachers' best source of "how-to" with specific children and their learning styles. Principals will model how to conference with and talk to parents in a nonthreatening way, or to make contracts with parents that will decrease student truancy or when appropriate, decrease the likelihood that students will imitate poor parental models. Principal men-

Please see Selecting, page 11

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Selecting Star Principals, *continued from page 5*

> **Aware of the dramatic role of affective needs on children at risk, the mentoring principal will use her or his considerable emotional intelligence to coach novices in ways to help teachers meet these tremendous needs.**

tors will also have concrete strategies for increasing the teacher's sense of accountability by living out every day the message: "This is our school, but I am responsible for everything that happens. I must do everything in my power to better enable the teachers' and students' success. If I fail, no one else is to blame; if I succeed, we all – especially the students – have succeeded."

Aware of the dramatic role of affective needs on children at risk, the mentoring principal will use his or her considerable emotional intelligence to coach novices in ways to help teachers meet these tremendous needs. In a recent investigation of schools, both high and low in socioeconomic status, one theme among many stood out: that teachers are increasingly called upon to be sensitive and responsive to the emotions and the relationship of these emotions to the achievement of at-risk youth. In many cases, teachers work with those for whom life makes no sense at all, who long for acceptance by peers or almost anyone at almost any cost, who go home to a soup kitchen, who don't understand cause and effect ("If I shoot him, I may not go to jail") and who think success is achieved mostly by luck, not hard work or effort. Principals must help teachers who work with these students day after day answer questions like "Am I gay?" or "My girlfriend left me for a jerk; I'm afraid I might do something stupid to him," or "What is a 'bastard,' anyway?" as asked by one adopted third grader. "Is sexual assault the same thing as rape?" one middle school student questions and looks to the teacher of high emotional intelligence for a response.

To some teachers the real-world nature of teaching is surprising; for others – perhaps older, more mature or more attentive adults – it is the heart and soul of doing for someone else what was lifesaving for them (Dill & Stafford, 1996). Teachers willing to listen meet in advisory groups with students weekly, have class meetings daily, counsel kids in hallways, refer to trained counselors, talk about race and prejudice, and – in untold and possibly mind-boggling numbers of cases – keep kids safe from danger, disaster and depression. They see their role in essentially a different way than those who can not, do

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Publisher & Education Editor
Sandi Borden

Communications Director
Dorian Martin

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> **...schools with students at risk and in poverty need more resources, better buildings, more technology, and more highly-paid personnel. But all these improvements will be useless without the key to success which cannot be bought: a star principal whose beliefs empower teachers and students to succeed in school regardless of their life constraints.**

not or will not listen. Such teachers need the support of specially selected and trained administrators.

Measuring

Overseeing the professional growth and evaluation of teachers is one of the administrator's most important functions, one in which an able principal mentor will share both successful evaluation strategies and unsuccessful, hence "de-selection," experiences with a novice. Measuring and evaluating a teacher's lifelong craft learning is one of the novice learner's most difficult and important tasks. Appropriate professional development of teachers is based on students' achievements and varies according to the teacher's learning style, subject matter and needs. The novice administrator will observe the principal mentor providing leadership in peer coaching that may require changes in teachers' schedules; supporting team lesson planning that may require mutual planning periods; and sharing decisions once made by the principal alone but now shared by several players who need a time and a place to meet, an agenda and the assurance their shared decision-making will be implemented.

Effective principal mentors will demonstrate ways to stay on the lookout for relevant research, equipment that may facilitate the teacher's work, or school practices that make a difference. Keenly aware of the professional development needs of the teachers, star principals teach novice administrators how to help others measure their success by keeping their own professional development active, research-based, well-shared and exciting.

In sum, schools with students at risk and in poverty need more resources, better buildings, more technology and more highly-paid personnel. But all these improvements will be useless without the key to success, which cannot be bought: a star principal whose beliefs empower teachers and students to succeed in school regardless of their life constraints.

Editor's Note: Dr. Martin Haberman is the distinguished professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Dr. Vicki Dill is the director of research for Haberman Educational Foundation. Information on how to learn the "Star Teacher" and "Star Principal" Selection Interviews is available from The Haberman Educational Foundation, a not-for-profit foundation dedicated to finding good teachers for children in poverty, at 800-667-6185 or e-mail at d.staff@ix.netcom.com or dillhome @midusa.net.

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